Distinguished members of the Health Appropriations Subcommittee:

My name is Ashvita Dhar; I live in Trumbull, Connecticut. I support Connecticut Against Gun Violence's efforts as I am a member of their Youth Council.

I am testifying in support of the $2.5 million included in the Governor's budget on Line T1449 for the Department of Public Health to fund gun violence intervention grants in FY2024, and the $400,000 on Line 274 for operational expenses each year in FY2024 and FY2025.

But given the magnitude of the crisis of gun violence, especially in Connecticut's urban centers, I believe the grant appropriation needs to be larger, at $10 million in each year of the fiscal 2024-25 budget.

Our news channels frequently show displays of cruelty through mass shootings, school shootings, and police brutality. While these are imperative to fix, this focus often leads to our neglect of community gun violence. My brother attended Fairchild Wheeler Magnet School in Bridgeport, CT, where the campus was safe, but lockdowns were common. Consistent exposure to community gun violence poses physical, emotional, and social dangers that manifest well past the present time. If students in a lockdown away from direct harm are scared, how scared must the community be? Isn't it time we address the fears and risks of interpersonal gun violence? If we can't save our community, who can we save?

Moreover, Black and Hispanic people disproportionately experience the most gun violence. In the fight to achieve racial justice and protect the community, it is necessary to implement more than just gun laws. Although laws and legislation are critical, our allocation of resources to locally-funded programs will help solve problems at a smaller level which will help prevent their spread. We must break away from this cycle of violence and discrimination. I urge the Committee to increase the grant appropriation to break the pattern of violence.

Thank you to the Committee for hearing my testimony.

Sincerely,

Ashvita Dhar
Trumbull, CT